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# ice to increase stem opt worksite inspections

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U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("ICE") has recently increased site visits for employers who employ F-1 students under STEM OPT (short for Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics Optional Practical Training) work authorization. While ICE has had this authority since the STEM regulations were passed in 2016, the agency only recently started conducting site visits to ensure that employers and F-1 students remain in compliance with the regulations governing F-1 STEM OPT work authorization.

## **What Is STEM OPT?**

STEM OPT allows eligible F-1 visa students with STEM degrees from accredited U.S. colleges or universities to apply for an additional 24 months of Occupational Practical Training. This is in addition to the initial, one-year post-completion OPT granted to all non-STEM-degree F-1 students. In addition to the STEM degree requirements, the F-1 visa student must secure employment with a bona fide employer, work a minimum of 20 hours per week for that employer, and the employer must provide a formal, practical training and learning program within the STEM field which is related to the F-1 student's degree. Details of the training program are outlined by the employer on Form I-983, which is submitted to and approved by the Designated School Official at the F-1 student's academic institution.

## **What Is a Site Visit?**

ICE conducts site visits to ensure that STEM OPT students receive the structured and guided work-based learning experiences required by the regulations. The purpose of the site visit is to confirm that information reported on the F-1 student's Form I-983 training plan is accurate and being executed by the employer. ICE generally notifies employers at least 48 hours prior to conducting a STEM OPT site visit. However, ICE is authorized to conduct unannounced site visits...

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